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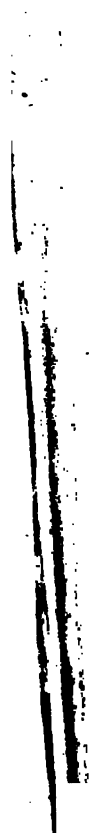
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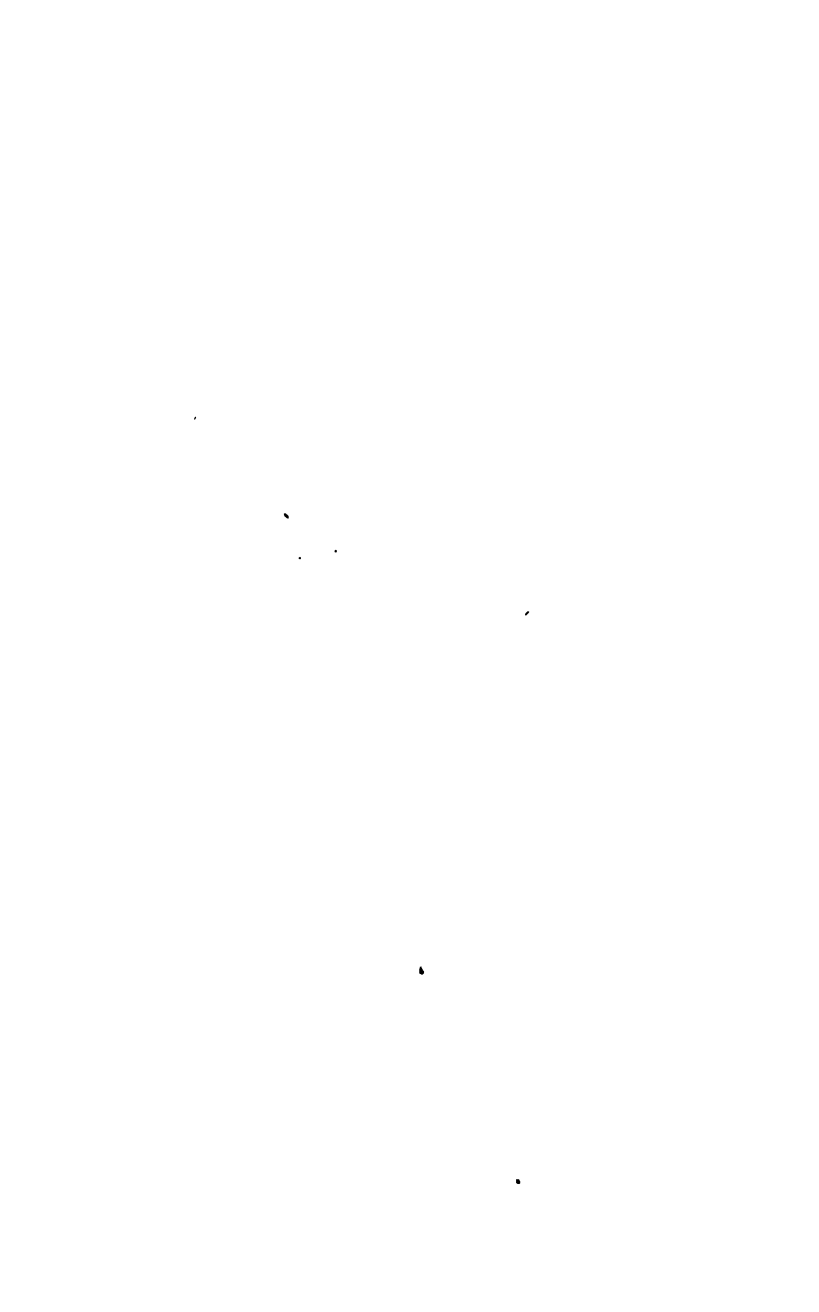


Robert Wrothtesley.

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THE
E S S A Y
ON
THE SIGNS
OF
CONVERSION AND UNCONVERSION
IN
Ministers of the Church,
TO WHICH THE
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
AND CHURCH UNION
IN THE
DIOCESE OF ST. DAVID'S
ADJUDGED THEIR PREMIUM FOR THE YEAR 1811.

SECOND EDITION.

Best having preached to others, I myself become a cast-away.

BY SAMUEL CHARLES WILKS, A.M.
OF ST. EDMUND HALL, OXFORD.

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PREFACE

TO THE

FIRST EDITION.

As a young man, an under-graduate, and a layman, the writer feels that some apology is necessary for the following publication. He can only observe, that it was very far from his intention to obtrude himself on the public as an author; but having been informed by the Bishop of St. David's, the President of the

Society for promoting Christian Knowledge and Church Union in his Lordship's Diocese, that the Society had adjudged a premium to this Essay, and intended to publish it, he conceived that it would have been affectation, and not modesty, to have started objections on the subject.

“ Conversion, in a religious sense, has two significations. It means either conversion from Paganism to Christianity (with which this Essay has no concern); or conversion from one state of Christianity to another, which is the subject of this Essay. By Baptism we are redeemed, through the death and merits of Jesus Christ, from the curse of original sin; and

are placed in a state of grace by admission into the Church of Christ, and to its inestimable privileges. From this state we may fall by sin committed after Baptism. From this fall we may also recover by repentance and newness of life, through the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. They who do not recover, are in an unconverted state. In this unconverted state, it is possible that a person may remain even to the time of his admission into holy orders. He may be unconscious of his state; it is therefore a matter of the highest moment and interest to him and to the people committed to his charge, to suggest the most probable means of exciting in the mind of such a Minister (if

such there be), a consciousness of his unconverted state. To do this is the subject of the following Essay; and it is endeavoured with every feeling of delicacy which is due to the subject, and of respect and reverence for the sacred Order to which it is addressed."

In looking over these pages for a Second Edition, the Author thinks it right to state, in reply to the queries of several friends, as well as the remarks of two or three of the periodical Reviewers, that the preceding paragraph of the Preface marked in inverted commas was added by the Society as the pamphlet passed through the press, and never met the Author's eye till he purchased some time afterwards a copy for his own re-perusal. For every other part of the sentiments in these pages he is himself responsible; and though he can no longer urge the excuse of being either an Under-graduate or a Layman, yet he still hopes for that indulgence which two or three years' experience in the ministry already convinces him this Essay most essentially requires.



INTRODUCTION.

THE terms Conversion and Unconversion, though of indispensable usefulness in the science of divinity, appear to labour under a degree of reproach which they by no means deserve. They are not, indeed, alone: for, almost all those words which are connected with the more unfashionable doctrines of Christianity are equally assailed. To endeavour, systematically, to prove the necessity of what may be called technical, theological terms, would be irrelevant to the subject in hand; but, since several of these terms may occur in the following pages more frequently than a person, who is prejudiced against them, might

be disposed to tolerate, a remark or two on the subject may not be wholly improper.

In the primitive church, the language of Christians, in speaking of religious subjects, was evidently modelled from the language of the New Testament. Among our own Ministers, also, both at the time of the Reformation, and for many years subsequent to that event, a similar practice is observable. At length, however, by the influence of various causes, Scripture language was disused, and even studiously avoided. The obvious pretext for this alteration in our theological style was, that many of the phrases employed in the common translation of the Bible, by being current among persons of enthusiastic minds, had acquired a secondary meaning unintended by the inspired

writers, and were therefore to be avoided, as much as possible, by all who did not wish to appear favourers of puritanism or hypocrisy. The suppression of these words and phrases was rendered easy and common by the general neglect of the doctrines with which they were connected. Ethical subjects, it was found, might be commodiously discussed without the aid of the terms peculiar to Christianity. If, however, an idea occasionally occurred which seemed naturally to suggest the use of the antiquated word, substitution was found to be a safe and respectable method of avoiding the difficulty. Thus, for example: *virtue*, *reformation*, and moral *consciousness*, began to be employed, where less scrupulous divines would have said *sanctification*, *conversion*, or *conviction of sin*; till at length, words, once current among us, were almost exiled

from the pulpit, and might, by this time, have been hardly known, had not the language of our received translation, and our public formularies, preserved them from oblivion.

The present age, however, is one in which men are not anxious to conform to any practice, either good or bad, merely because their fathers did so before them. Without, therefore, considering whether the language of the New Testament were, or were not, sometimes forced into the service of ignorance or hypocrisy, and without inquiring whether the neglect of it might not arise far more on account of hatred to the doctrines themselves, than to the vehicle by which they were conveyed, let us view the subject simply as it concerns Ministers in the present day.

It is objected, that by using technical terms in divinity, men learn to substitute words for ideas, to the great prejudice of real religious knowledge. It may, however, be obviously answered, that a technical term, when once explained, is a sufficient symbol of a complete idea; and will, after such explanation, recall the idea far more effectually than could be done by circumlocution or paraphrase. Why should that which facilitates the knowledge of every other science, produce a contrary effect in divinity? The objection may, indeed, show the necessity that exists for a Minister diligently to explain the signification of the technical terms which he employs, but is by no means a sufficient argument against a judicious use of them.

It has been further objected, that these peculiar phrases often prejudice

men of refined minds against the Gospel, and thus prevent their afterwards examining its doctrines with impartiality. But the fact appears to be, that men dislike the expressions, only because they dislike the ideas conveyed. No change of language can make the doctrines of the cross agreeable to an unconverted man. It is from Deists, and Socinians, and pseudo-philosophers, that the loudest complaints are heard. But it would surely be an excess of courtesy to sacrifice words made venerable by the lips of saints, confessors, and martyrs, and considered by ages past as the accredited representatives of specific religious ideas, to please the fastidious taste of a few individuals, who can have no motive for desiring a change in language, except so far as it may be a prelude to a change in doctrines themselves.

Yet, although these and similar arguments are far from proving the point intended, they ought, undoubtedly, to make Ministers cautious of giving unnecessary offence by any thing that may be justly denominated cant or affectation. Why should not the general language of Ministers be that of other literary characters, as far, at least, as purity and simplicity are concerned? This is perfectly compatible with a free and unfettered use of those terms which are peculiar to Christianity as a science, whenever such use is necessary or advisable. Scriptural phrases may be quoted as such. They cannot possibly appear stiff or improper, except when used as our own language, instead of that of the word of God. When judiciously introduced, they are highly elegant and pleasing. A medium ought, of course, in this, as in other things, to

be preferred ; and a discreet Minister may easily show that he is not ashamed either of the language or the doctrines of Scripture, without at the same time giving cause of disgust to a fastidious hearer by any unnecessary peculiarities of expression. That man must either be a very imprudent advocate for the Gospel, or else its deliberate enemy, who would not endeavour to convey his ideas in the manner which appears to him least likely to excite prejudice. If, however, this is to be done by softening down the ideas themselves; or if, as is usually the case, the absence of the appropriate term should induce his hearers to suspect that he disliked or disbelieved the doctrine conveyed by that term, it surely becomes him to act with honest boldness, and to use his own judgment, regardless of the sneer of mor-

bid delicacy, or the clamours of Soci-
nian refinement.

As a practical argument, it may be observed, that those Ministers who studiously avoid scriptural phraseology are not found, even in discourses addressed to the more cultivated ranks of society, to be the most interesting or useful: but, with regard to the lower classes, the argument is far more powerful; for, among persons of this description, undisguised scriptural language is absolutely necessary, if a Minister wishes to be either understood or believed.

In our own day it is, perhaps, more than ever necessary to recur to Scripture language, and to use it in its unrestricted, unsophisticated meaning, since there appears among many individuals an affectation of employing it

in a sort of refined and "improved" signification. Should this practice become general, it would be one of the most dangerous expedients hitherto discovered for disguising the genuine spirit of Christianity. Men, who evidently shun those biblical expressions which have been usually connected with the more unwelcome truths of the Gospel, furnish an argument against themselves; and it is not difficult to convince an unprejudiced person that such conduct implies a secret conviction that their doctrines and sentiments cannot be those of the Holy Scriptures; for who suppresses evidence that strengthens his own cause? But when, on the other hand, the peculiar terms and phrases of the sacred writings are employed liberally, and without any apparent reservation, but at the same time insidiously introduced in such a manner or such a

situation as to abridge or pervert their true import, men are in far greater danger of being deceived than if new terms were employed, and the language of Scripture purposely suppressed. A Minister who frequently and boldly speaks of sanctification, conversion, and faith in Christ, but always uses these terms merely as opposed to open profligacy and professed infidelity, employs a method of undermining the Gospel as destructive and alarming as it is artful and disingenuous. How necessary then is it for every true Minister of Christ to endeavour to preserve the language of the Bible from oblivion on the one hand, and from misrepresentation on the other; and to strive to correct the religious fastidiousness of the age, rather than by a servile submission to encourage and increase it!

If these remarks be correct as far as respects Ministers, they will of course apply in general to all writers on religious topics. Without further apology, therefore, it may be proper to proceed to the immediate subject of these pages.

ESSAY,

&c.

THE evidences of conversion or unconversion in a Minister are of two kinds; those which assist him in judging of himself, and those which develope his character in the sight of others.

Of the former little will be said; since a Minister's rules for determining his own character do not widely differ from those which apply to a private Christian, and are therefore not the immediate subjects of discussion in the present Essay. A hint or two, however, may not be inappropriate.

The pencil of Inspiration so clearly and frequently sketches the two classes of character, into which mankind are divided, that the most ignorant reader cannot but perceive the contrast. It may therefore appear almost impossible, that any servant of the Sanctuary, who, from the peculiar duties of his station, must necessarily be in some degree conversant with the sacred writings, should be ignorant of the Scripture evidences of conversion ; or, having discerned those evidences, should be unsolicitous to ascertain in what manner they affect himself. Yet that there have been, in every age, persons thus ignorant and thus indifferent, is a fact rather to be lamented than denied. An individual in private life is often impressed with the injunctions of the Apostle, "Examine yourselves whether ye be

in the faith," "try your own selves," "make your calling and election sure;" while the teacher who reads them, and professes to explain their import, is unaffected and unimproved. Several concurring causes may produce this effect.

In the first place, a Minister (at least a young Minister) is too liable to consider faith, repentance, conversion, and similar Christian ideas, rather as literary topics which it is his office to discuss, than as important realities in which he himself is concerned as much as his congregation; and when once a man begins to view religion not as of personal, but merely of professional importance, he has an obstacle in his course with which a private Christian is unacquainted.

The continual recurrence of religious duties may be assigned as another cause of professional indifference; for, although nothing can be more useful to a pious Minister than the frequency of the "means of grace," yet to an unconverted one nothing can be more injurious; since the most affecting things, by losing their novelty, lose their interest, and become merely official functions. It is not likely, humanly speaking, that what has been habitually repeated with indifference, should at length appear with the same striking importance with which it presents itself to those to whom it is new.

Again, a Minister often deceives himself with a vague dependence on the sanctity of his office, and forgets that it is very possible, that, after preaching to others, he himself may

be a cast-away. He, in many instances, seems to take for granted that being a Minister necessarily implies being a devout Christian; than which nothing can be more unscriptural or false,

Prejudice against the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel is one of the most common obstacles in the way of conversion; and to this prejudice a Minister is more exposed than a layman, since he has not only the sources of prejudice and objection natural to the hearts of all men, but some which are peculiar to himself. An unbiassed person cannot easily withstand the plain statements of Scripture; but he who knows something of religious controversies, may easily soften them down, till they become of no value; and in this manner, by his prejudices, close every

avenue to conviction. A Minister thus prepossessed, instead of admitting the Scripture doctrine of conversion, of a total renovation of heart, endeavours to neutralize every text that explains its nature or inculcates its necessity.

If, however, he be induced to acknowledge the necessity of this radical change, it surely becomes a question of paramount importance, whether or not it has been realized. The subject will now appear to him with a prominence which it never before possessed. He will begin anxiously to examine whether his religion be merely the decency of professional character, or whether it be in truth the energetic influence of vital Christianity. He will inquire, if, commencing in a consciousness of the infinite guilt of sin, and the incompe-

tency of man to deserve salvation by the best obedience, which since the fall he is able to bestow, it have proceeded to self-renunciation, to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and love to God the Father; and lastly, whether it evidences itself by a life of holiness, and a progressive conformity to the divine image. His thoughts, his words, his actions, and above all, his motives, will be subjects of careful investigation. He will pray for the divine guidance in ascertaining his own character. He will immediately perceive, that love to God and to holiness, hatred to sin, an earnest desire to obtain salvation himself, and to be the honoured instrument of conveying it to others, are characteristic features of a converted Minister; and in proportion as these are visible in himself, he may judge favourably of his religious state. Agitated spirits and in-

explicable emotions are not the evidences of piety. He must look rather for a heavenly principle, active in its tendency, purifying the affections, expanding the soul, elevating the hopes and desires, crucifying the corrupt inclinations, fixing the heart on God, moderating self-love, exciting to universal benevolence, in a word, regenerating the whole man, and "making him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." He must expect to see the efficacy of this principle most conspicuous in the subjugation of those sins to which he is naturally most inclined, and which, under any influence short of true religion, he would be desirous of retaining. He will learn to look not so much to his zeal or delight in the public services of religion, as to the sincerity of his private devotions, since the former may be influenced by social feelings,

while the latter are seldom cordial but in a renovated mind. To these characteristics may be added acquiescence in the divine will, and filial eagerness to perform the divine commands; which are dispositions of mind so exclusively appropriate to a genuine Christian, that where they exist, or are fervently implored, other evidences will not be sought in vain. If, in a word, to be a true Christian, be the pre-eminent desire of his soul, and if the sincerity of this desire be correspondently evinced in his life, he already possesses an invaluable evidence of the renovation of his nature.

But the object of this Essay, as has been already observed, is rather to furnish criteria by which others may judge of a Minister, than to state the evidences by which he may estimate himself. The difficulty here is of

course greater than in the former case, since it is impossible to see the secret feelings of another man's heart. Yet, although we cannot pierce a Minister's retirement, or listen to the aspirations that ascend from his closet; though we cannot unfold his hidden motives, or witness the silent struggle in his breast between remaining sin and increasing holiness; we *may* view the operation of his principles on his conduct, and thus ascertain the religious habit of his mind.

In forming our opinion, there are two prejudices to be avoided; which, although of a contrary nature, are almost equally efficacious in perverting the judgment. Persons whose dispositions are amiable, but who estimate character rather by the standard of the world than of the Bible, often mistake mere professional decorum for

Christian piety, and are therefore willing to consider many individuals as faithful ambassadors for God, who are decidedly the servants of the world. Persons of a contrary temper, especially if much conversant with hypocrisy, revert to the opposite extreme. No consistency of character can gain their approbation, or attract their confidence; they impute the most exalted piety to questionable motives, and speak of religion in a Clergyman in no higher a view than of diligence in a merchant, or sagacity in a politician. The first class will, in consequence, consider the evidences of conversion superfluous; the last, inadequate and unsatisfactory. But avoiding these extremes, we may reasonably and scripturally judge of the heart by the life; and when we consider the various situations in which a Minister is placed, and the

different aspects in which his conduct may be viewed, it is almost impossible he should be long concealed. He is a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid.

Let us, then, consider the evidences of a Minister's religious character, as they relate to his preaching and his conduct.

If, with minds neither prejudiced by education, nor rendered suspicious by controversy, we were to collate our Homilies, Articles, and Liturgy, with the unerring standard of truth, it would be no difficult task to discover what opinions a true Christian, a member of the English Church, ought to cherish, and consequently, what doctrines her Ministers should inculcate and defend. The religion of the Bible evidently consists in "repent-

ance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," accompanied with such a life of active and passive holiness as may best evince the solidity and practical efficacy of our belief. Since, however, such a religion is inseparably connected with the doctrines of Scripture, every pious Minister will think those doctrines of immense importance in his public ministration. The general feature by which the writings of the Apostles and primitive saints are distinguished from the productions of moralists and philosophers, is evidently a cordial belief in the fundamental principles of the Gospel, and a practical acquaintance with their nature and effects. Every thing else is not only rendered subordinate, but almost annihilated. Natural religion, with its motives and its hopes, its errors and its excellencies, is eclipsed amidst the glories of that dispensation

which “brought life and immortality to light.”

Now, unless the condition of man, or the nature of Christianity, be wholly changed by subsequent refinements, it obviously results that those features which characterized the discourses of Christian Ministers in purer ages, will be visible also in the discourses of Christian Ministers in modern times. Nothing more, therefore, is necessary to form an estimate of a Minister, as far as preaching is a just evidence, than to ascertain what have been the uniformly received opinions of saints in every age, and what the distinguishing topics of their pulpit instructions. Since, however, those topics and opinions were derived from the volume of Inspiration, and professed to be correct or valuable only in proportion as they corresponded to

their model, it is infinitely safer to refer to the Scripture itself, than to the practice of its most holy imitators: — and such a reference will prove, that the design of Christianity, as far as it relates to man, is either to convince him that he is in a state of moral depravity, or to show him what means are provided for his restoration to the divine image, and the re-attainment of his lost felicity and holiness. Here, then, is the substance of a pious Minister's preaching. The unity of design that exists in every page of the Bible will always be visible among the whole body of its genuine converts. It may be said, that to a being fallible as man, error is often unavoidable. This, as far as it applies to the non-essentials of religion, may indeed be true; but no considerations of this nature ought to induce us, in the wantonness of false candour, to

imagine that he can be a Christian who disbelieves the essentials of Christianity, or he a converted Minister in whose preaching those essentials do not habitually appear. A man who derives all his own hopes and enjoyments from the Gospel, as every true Christian undoubtedly must, will not substitute in his preaching the instructions of natural religion or heathen philosophy, for the purifying, animating, and indispensable peculiarities of the Christian revelation.

But what, it may be asked, are the peculiarities, the preaching of which is so important a test of a Minister's piety? The most obvious is, that man has departed from original righteousness, and on account of sin is justly obnoxious to the divine anger. This fact, and the consequence de-

duced from it, form the hypothesis on which the preaching of every converted Minister, and, indeed, the whole scheme of Christianity, is founded; and which being denied, Christianity and preaching become inappropriate and useless. A Minister who admits these truths fully and unequivocally, must, in consequence, admit the necessity of the atonement; and who, that admits its necessity, can be unconscious of its importance? or who, that allows its importance, can fail to make it a prominent topic in his parochial addresses?

In addition to these points, *Justification*, solely and exclusively through the merits of Christ, has been always considered, among men of piety, as a doctrine plainly revealed in Scripture, and of essential value in the system of human redemption. They have view-

ed it, not as an appendage or corollary, much less as an excrescence, but as the sum, the substance, the life, the spirit, of the whole dispensation. On this only, their own hopes of pardon and acceptance have been founded, and on this only have they exhorted others to depend. Having learned from Revelation the nature of God and the extent of the divine requisitions, and having at the same time discovered the utter incompetency of man, since the fall, to secure to himself a place in heaven by sinless obedience, they have acknowledged that nothing but a revelation of gratuitous mercy could relieve our wants, or be worth our acceptance. On these accounts, the doctrine in question has in every pure church been considered of supreme importance; and, whatever may be the prevailing sentiment of any particular age, the Gospel and

its effects being always the same, the piety of that Minister is undoubtedly suspicious, whose preaching is heretical or defective on this fundamental subject of justification by the merits of Christ.

Intimately connected with the last-mentioned topic is that of *the Divinity of our Saviour*, a doctrine which, beyond most others, has been ridiculed and impugned; but which is so explicitly taught in the Sacred Writings, and so necessarily implied in the whole economy of human salvation, that it would be difficult to imagine him a converted man who denies its truth, or him a faithful Minister who forgets its importance. The disbelief of this doctrine, virtually implies a disbelief of Christianity (except so far as it is a system of ethics), and must, therefore, be the most fatal of mistakes.

The *Divinity of the Holy Spirit* will hardly be denied, but by men who have read the Scriptures with the express design of perverting them ; or his agency, but by those who have previously concluded that it is not necessary, and, therefore, is not promised. Every Minister of the Church of England has so solemnly attested his belief on these two subjects * (and, indeed, on all those before men-

* Vide, for instance, Article V. Athanasian Creed, Hom. XVI. &c. It may be here proper to observe, that particular references either to the Scriptures themselves, or to the formularies of the Church, have been purposely omitted ; not because they could not readily have been supplied, but because the statements here made are so broad and general, that it is easy to decide whether or not they are agreeable to the tenour of Scripture and the doctrines of the Church, without being in every instance furnished with specific citations for that purpose.

tioned), that, even if unconverted, we might reasonably expect him to be orthodox. In that very service, for example, by which he is initiated into the Ministry, he distinctly acknowledges the Sacred Spirit's influence; and that, not as a vague dogma, or a mere article of peace, but as a practical truth, and as the very bias that incited him to become a Christian pastor. This spiritual agency, a pious man will not be content to forget with the day of his Ordination. He will of course assiduously guard it against the misconceptions of fanaticism, distinguish it from the more evident and miraculous effusions of the primitive ages, and teach his hearers to hope for it only in the appointed use of means and second causes; but he will not deny its existence, dispute its necessity, explain it away till it becomes useless,

or fail to implore it both for himself and the people committed to his charge. The man who denies the influences of the Holy Spirit, can of course have no reason for supposing that they have been vouchsafed to himself; and since they are represented in Scripture as necessary to implant either the desire or the ability to return to God, he can in consequence have no just evidence of his conversion. He, on the contrary, who is really and visibly bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, and showing his faith by his works, will with humility acknowledge, that whatever is good in him flows from a higher source than his own heart, and, without the least semblance of enthusiasm, will consider it as an emanation from that Being "from whom *all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed.*"

These, then, appear to be some of the "peculiarities" of the Christian revelation, to which several others might be added. It is by such doctrines that the Gospel is distinguished from other systems of ethics or religion, and by such, chiefly, that the preaching of its true disciples differs from that of merely nominal Christian ministers. An irreligious man, even though he should be orthodox, will usually show so much indifference in defending, illustrating, and enforcing these sublime doctrines, as to prove he does not cordially admire them. But to the Minister of piety they are of inestimable value. A man of this description will not dare to suppress, pervert, or neutralize the statements of the Bible, but will exhibit them, as far as possible, in their genuine colours, without attempting to lower them to the standard of fashion, or to

supersede them by mere deistical philosophy. When we perceive a preacher evidently more anxious to explain away the peculiarities of the word of God, than to unfold them and show their importance, we may surely infer that he does not possess that implicit belief of the truth, infallibility, consistency, and sacredness of the inspired writings, which is a necessary effect of real conversion.

Hitherto doctrines only have been mentioned; but an anxiety for much more than the inculcation of mere speculative truth will be conspicuous in a pious Minister. Convinced, by his own experience, that religion is a practical and influential principle, he will feel it his duty frequently to describe its nature and effects. A constant theme of his discourses will be the necessity of that holiness, “with-

out which no man can see the Lord." On this subject, however, he widely differs from the unconverted Minister, who, not being practically acquainted with any evangelical principle of obedience, imagines there is no way of evincing the importance of holiness, but by representing it as the meritorious cause of human redemption. Such a representation, however, argues rather that pride, which is inherent in fallen man, than that humility which is the characteristic of a true believer. Besides, it contradicts the direct testimony of Scripture, which invariably speaks of holiness, not as a procuring cause, but as a necessary consequence; not as the price by which Heaven is purchased, but as the evidence of our meetness to enjoy it, and indeed the meetness itself, by which we are qualified for so doing. There is, therefore, a great difference between the preach-

ing of the two characters on the subject in question. While the one, from his partial and merely theoretical knowledge, frigidly endeavours to recommend obedience to God by motives of fear, or prudence, or expediency, the other speaks of it with delight as the pleasurable service of a willing subject, the corresponding appetency of a renovated nature, the indispensable evidence of Christian principle, the necessary result of faith, and the inseparable concomitant of love. While he possesses, in common with the former character, those inducements to holiness, that arise from its intrinsic beauty, and from its being enjoined by divine command as part of the moral law, and therefore of immutable obligation, he will insist chiefly, though not exclusively, on those higher motives of love and gratitude which are so frequently urged

in the Apostolic writings, and which are always found in practice to be far more efficacious than mere abstract reasoning or philosophic suasion.

In like manner, in speaking of sin, he stands on higher ground than the moral declaimer. The topic may be the same, but the method of discussion is different. His standard of reference is more exalted. He is not contented with having displayed the dreadful consequences of vice, as they affect the individual and society, but dwells with holy earnestness on its guilt in the sight of God, its contrariety to the divine nature, and its inevitable consequences in a future world.

But the difference between the two characters, on the subject of holiness, does not rest here; for an unconverted

man has as little conception of the *extent* of true obedience, as of its properties and *nature*. With the religion of the heart he is unacquainted. The inculcation of a refined morality is the highest object of his preaching; and, as if holiness did not include morality, he even ventures to blame those, who, following the example of Christ and his Apostles, endeavour to implant good works on evangelical principles, and to show the necessity of a complete renovation of heart, in order that the acceptable fruits of holiness may appear in the life.

A similarity or difference of views on the subject of true obedience to God usually includes a similarity or difference on other important topics. No one, for example, whose ideas on this point are scriptural, can doubt the necessity of the atonement, or the

value of the doctrine of divine influences; since he must obviously perceive that his own defective righteousness can be of no avail in justifying him before the infinitely holy God; and that, even though justified by that faith in Christ, which is so frequently mentioned in Scripture, and desirous, above all things, of continuing the sacred course he has begun, still infinitely more than the unassisted energies of human nature is requisite to keep him from falling, and to preserve him in the paths of holiness and obedience.

In like manner, all the other essential doctrines of Christianity will appear in the preaching of a pious Minister to be articles of a moral and practical importance; while to the opposite character more than half the Scripture is confused and unintelli-

gible;—the doctrinal and preceptive parts scarcely appear to have any necessary connexion:—if he choose for his subject one of the most essential tenets of the Gospel, he seems unconscious in what manner it applies to the improvement of the conduct and the heart ; if, on the other hand, a moral duty be his topic, he probably mistakes the New Testament motives for enforcing it, forgets that proffered assistance which is necessary for its performance, and leaves unnoticed that faith in Christ which alone can make it acceptable or pure. In his zeal for morality, he forgets the source from which all true morality flows. He is even surprised that other Ministers should so zealously and frequently insist on doctrines which to himself appear of but little practical value, and which, if admitted at all into his sys-

tem, are suffered to lie dormant and unproductive.

But surely, after the experience of nearly two thousand years, it might without danger of mistake be admitted as a demonstrated fact, that morality has always advanced or declined, in proportion as the Gospel has been preached in its genuine simplicity, or in a garbled form; and, consequently, that nothing but the undisguised doctrines of Christianity can accomplish even that object which the worldling considers as the only end of the clerical establishment. But this object, great as it is, is far from being the utmost that a pious Minister proposes to himself. His preaching is founded on the supposition, that a man, though outwardly moral, may fail of being a true Christian, and in consequence fail of the rewards of Christianity.

Internal religion, a religion of motives and intentions, a religion corresponding to that which our Saviour taught in his Sermon on the Mount, he esteems necessary to make the most brilliant or useful action acceptable to that Being, whom "without faith it is impossible to please." He conceives, therefore, that the doctrinal parts of Christianity are essentially necessary in his preaching. Whether he argues from the practice of the inspired writers, or from the nature of the thing itself, he arrives at the same conclusion, that an exhibition of the moral precepts of the Gospel, without the doctrines on which they depend, is as contrary to the intention of its Author, as the opposite error of inculcating its doctrines and forgetting its commands. He insists, therefore, on the necessity of faith no less than of good works; the former as that which

justifies, the latter as the indispensable evidences of our being in a state of grace.

It has been shown, that, even as far as relates to outward morality, the unsophisticated preaching of the Gospel is necessary to effect any considerable reform:—but when to this circumstance, which, it should be observed, proves only the political and moral expediency of such preaching, are added those higher considerations which show its infinite importance, as connected with the awful responsibility of the preacher, and with the eternal interests of the human soul, it ceases to be a question what manner of preaching a converted Minister will feel it his duty to adopt.

The preceding observations are not intended to be personal. In describ-

ing the preaching of a good man, the author would detach it from accidents and localities, and sketch only those features which are common to the class in general. Ministers of undoubted piety may differ in their views on a thousand unessential subjects ; their sentiments and style of preaching may be variously modified by the schools in which they have studied, the different habits they may have formed, or the audiences they address ; but amidst great variety, there will be much in common ; and it will always be evident that they approach nearer each other, in proportion as each becomes more assimilated to their divine Exemplar. But to draw the *exact* line of demarcation on the subject of preaching is perhaps impossible, since it cannot be ascertained what is the smallest proportion in which a good man, whose views are as yet some-

what obscure, may exhibit even the essentials of Christianity. Many, perhaps, are pious and sincere, who would not be considered by some of their more advanced brethren, as exhibiting, with sufficient clearness, "the truth as it is in Jesus." Even the disciples of our Lord were not, at their first setting out, perfectly acquainted with the whole system of Revelation. The progress of religious truth in various minds is various. The inhabitant of the torrid zone, and of the polar circle, both enjoy the light of the celestial luminary, though on the one it burst suddenly with irresistible splendour, and to the other be preceded by a lengthened twilight.

These observations, however, be it remembered, are not intended to encourage that spirit of indifference and false candour which is already too pre-

valent in the world; but simply to check that dogmatizing, and perhaps uncharitable propensity, which is sometimes visible among the best of men, and which commonly arises, by a sort of moral re-action, from the very indecision and indifference of others. For, after allowing every thing that a Christian can concede, or that the most enlarged and noble views of the subject may suggest, it is still certain, that the prominence of the Gospel system in his preaching must ever remain a conspicuous criterion of a converted Minister; a criterion belonging so necessarily to every individual of the class, that, where it is wanting, no regularity of morals, or even ardour in defending the outworks of Christianity, ought to be considered a sufficient evidence of genuine conversion. A man may be sincere, he may be gradually approaching the

right path ; but, till he is actually in it, he must not be held up as an example for others *.

But the preaching of a Minister is far from being the only test of his

* To many persons there may appear some contrariety of sentiment in the preceding remarks ; but they are not in reality opposed to each other. An object appears to vary as our points of observation change. It was necessary to distinguish the preaching of the true Christian from that of the Antinomian, on the one hand ; and of the mere moralist, on the other : so that, to a person who is content to found his religion on detached passages of Scripture, and to overlook the general spirit and design of the whole, the writer may have appeared alternately to advocate different sides of the same question. The only reply, however, that needs to be made to this unfounded charge of inconsistency, is, that a similar charge has been frequently urged against two of the inspired writers themselves, and still continues to be urged against every one who follows their combined example.

religious character. Were it so, we might never come to a conclusion; since it is almost impossible to discover characteristics of preaching so general as to exclude *no* pious character; and, at the same time, so exclusively appropriate, as to admit no doubtful one. In a given case, it is often easy to discover, that the preaching of a certain individual is erroneous or defective; and to show that the error or defect is so radical and extensive, as to make it incredible that the person under consideration should be a sincere believer. But a general question cannot so easily be answered: for, after every caution and limitation, we shall discover in practice that some unexpected peculiarities occur to render our rules less applicable than we had in theory supposed. Error, we shall find, may be modified till it becomes undefinable, and truth garbled till it loses its cha-

racteristic properties; a hypocrite may affect orthodoxy, and partial error be visible among the pious and sincere.

In order, therefore, to form a correct judgment, let us consider a Minister's preaching, not exclusively, but in connexion with the general tenour of his life.

The most conspicuous aim of a pious Minister, and that to which his whole conduct may be reduced, is an ardent desire "to save himself and those that hear him." No powers of language can describe the intensity with which this feeling often glows in the bosom of a good man. Where such a feeling exists, it will always be evident to others. The natural disposition of a man, however cold or reserved, will not be able to overcome its influence. Some measure of holy

zeal is absolutely inseparable from the office and character of a pious Minister; it may vary with the different tempers of men, or with the degrees of their piety, but it will never be quite extinct. It is impossible that he who has imbibed even the smallest portion of the Christian spirit, that spirit which actuated Apostles, Confessors, and Martyrs, can remain an unconcerned spectator of the religious wants of those whose souls are intrusted to his care. He must of necessity bring into his ministerial functions something of that spirit which characterized the primitive ages. He will be anxious to know the state of his flock; his preaching will be cordial and affectionate; his private labours conscientious and unremitted; and in his whole conduct he will appear to value his bodily strength, and his mental attainments, only as they

promote the cause of the Redeemer, and the eternal interests of the human soul.

But zeal, it may be said, is often affected by the hypocrite, and is natural to a man of warm feelings. This, indeed, is true; so that, from its existence, we cannot *necessarily* infer the existence of true piety; still, however, if it be conducted on apparently Christian principles, and directed to a Christian end, we ought to judge favourably, and to leave to the Searcher of hearts to determine whether or not we are deceived. Negatively, however, the rule appears almost infallible, that where coldness and indifference occupy the place of ministerial zeal, there is always ground for suspicion and distrust.

May I be allowed to observe, that a Minister's conduct with regard to tithes and residence will often furnish an argument of this negative description? If St. Paul was willing even to labour, working with his hands, rather than the Gospel should be hindered, we may reasonably expect to find somewhat of the same spirit in all who in any degree partake of the same piety. What, then, shall be said of a Clergyman, who knowingly sacrifices his usefulness to a trifling dispute, or to the gratification of a litigious spirit? At best, it must be allowed, he does not give evidence of his deadness to the world, or his devotedness to the duties of the ministry.

It will, indeed, be confessed, with sorrow, that, in consequence of the avarice and injustice of mankind, even persons of piety must be sometimes

engaged in litigations on the subject of property; but there is always an obvious difference between the unwilling prosecution of a just, moderate, and legal claim, and that hard-hearted, unchristian spirit, which eagerly seizes on every means of advantage, and makes the Gospel itself subservient to the accumulation of wealth. The true servant of God views the emoluments attached to the Church as designed only to secure a perpetual and becoming ministration of a religion indispensably necessary to the salvation of men; whenever, therefore, his private interest appears at variance with the advancement of the Gospel, he dares not hesitate whether of the two to prefer.

With regard to residence, it will hardly be denied, that a man who, without lawful cause, neglects his ministerial duties, and pursues a mode

of life more congenial to his inclinations, affords some degree of occasion for suspecting his piety. Judging from this one circumstance alone, the decision of every Christian will be against him. Even among men of the world, the neglect of an ecclesiastical charge ought to be considered equally base with the desertion of a military or other responsible office. But, viewed in a religious light, it becomes a crime of much greater magnitude. A necessity is laid upon a Minister by the Almighty himself, and woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel. He has so solemnly pledged his services in the labours of the sanctuary, that nothing but a conscientious discharge of those labours (unless prevented by some lawful cause) can exculpate him from the guilt of "lying unto the Holy Ghost." When a consideration so awful produces no practical effects,

Charity herself must pause before she pronounce the individual a converted character.

The zeal of a good man will be evident, not only in the attention he gives to the more obvious duties of his profession, but also in his performance of various things which, to a worldly man, might appear works of supererogation. He will use every present means of benefiting his people, and will ardently employ the energies of his mind in discovering and pursuing new schemes of utility.

Pastoral visiting, wherever it is practicable, is universally considered by good men as of high importance and indispensable obligation. In numerous instances it is the best, and perhaps the only mode of conveying instruction, reproof, warning, admo-

nition, encouragement, or comfort. It is therefore in many cases the chief source of a Minister's usefulness ; for who is there that does not need to be reminded of various things which, for obvious reasons, cannot be discussed in a mixed assembly, but which are highly important for his individual edification? Yet, notwithstanding the acknowledged importance of this duty, it is one so arduous, and so completely opposed to the spirit of the present age, that it will seldom be faithfully performed but by a man of pious character ; so that a diligent discharge of it ought always to be considered a favourable omen *.

* To discharge this duty faithfully, it is of course necessary that a Minister be well acquainted with the circumstances of his parishioners. Hence arises a considerable argument against the practice of certain individuals, chiefly among the

He who is habitually sensible of the importance of eternity, as every

unbeneficed part of the clergy, who, though in other respects perhaps faithful and consistent, yet not adverting to the necessity of continued residence among the same people, are perpetually changing their place of ministration. Sufficient attention has not been paid to this subject. Ministers who cannot by any means be charged with general indifference to the interests of religion, are often seen to injure it by their conduct in this respect. The most frivolous pretexts are sometimes urged by the parties concerned, and admitted by others, in cases where nothing but considerations of great urgency ought to have been suffered to have any influence. To justify a Minister's removal, it is not enough that he leave, as his successor, a man of piety and discretion: for a frequent change of pastors must necessarily tend to injure a parish, however careful each succeeding one may be to prevent such a consequence. On the mind of a Minister himself, this inconsistency must also produce an injurious effect. His zeal, and diligence, and affection, will, in most cases, become languid; and he

good man must be, will not neglect the favourable opportunities afford-

will labour with reluctance, being no longer excited by that local interest, that individual attachment, that personal solicitude, which often stimulate to exertion more effectually than the most powerful general incitements. Yet were he even to become *more* zealous and diligent after every new change, his usefulness to others, as far as it depends upon a knowledge of their pursuits, dispositions, and individual temptations, would necessarily be diminished.

If a Minister's health or worldly circumstances indispensably require his removal, and perhaps, in some instances, if a scene of more extensive usefulness be open before him, he may not be presumptuous in considering these things as the dictates of Providence. But what excuse can be assigned for the conduct of him who quits the station which Providence has appointed him to hold, merely to gratify an avaricious or an inconstant disposition?

At no time, perhaps, has the necessity of long-continued residence been so great as at present. In former ages men looked up to their pastors with

ed by the clerical office of attending the sick, the aged, and the

reverence and regard, so that nothing but the most unclerical and profligate conduct could weaken their affections or their confidence. But in the present state of things, owing to the prevalence of revolutionary and infidel principles, or to other causes, which it is not the object of this note to investigate, a Minister enters a parish under very different circumstances. Far from finding his people obedient and attentive to him in virtue of his ministerial office, he discovers that he must be indebted for his influence to his personal character. If, however, he be properly attentive to the duties of his station, he gradually acquires esteem and consideration; his opportunities of doing good are now multiplied, and his authority and example become of essential service to the interests of religion. Personal friendship, and long habits of union, at length confirm the bonds of attachment that unite him to his people; and his general knowledge of their characters being now complete, his ministerial labours are performed under every circumstance that can be expected to give them their due effect.

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dying. It is not conceivable that a man of such a character can be informed that one of the souls intrusted

The fickle character, on the contrary, encounters every day new difficulties. He ploughs the ground, but stays not to enjoy the harvest. After anxiously watching over the tender infancy of his "children in the faith," he suddenly leaves them exposed to "every wind of doctrine," and to the various snares and dangers with which they are surrounded. He is a stranger to the pleasures of the venerable Pastor, who, having been long stationary, has beheld a race of faithful and experienced Christians grow up beneath his care, anxious to repay, with gratitude and affection, his former labours, and to solace his declining years by walking worthy of the profession he has taught them to embrace. Were a Minister seriously to contrast these rational and elevated pleasures, with the joylessness of an old age spent among strangers to whom he is attached by no tie but that of interest, he would begin to look with far less anxiety to the prospect of new preferments, and would learn to rest content with the station which Providence had assigned him.

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to his care is about to appear at the tribunal of God, without feeling an anxiety to point out the only way in which its eternal happiness can be secured. Indifference, on such occasions, is something worse than mere cruelty, and implies either a disbelief of the awful realities of a future world, or a practical disregard of their importance; neither of which is consistent with a proper state of mind.

To a converted Minister who is living in the spirit of his profession, the religious instruction of the young, and particularly the children of the poor, will be an object of marked attention. Many circumstances will arise in the course of his parochial labours, by which we may discover his views and feelings on this important subject; for, in addition to catechising (which it should be remember-

ed is a part of the *regular* and *stipulated* duty consigned to Ministers of the Establishment), he will on other convenient occasions, such, for instance, as when engaged in preparing them for confirmation, evince his anxiety for their spiritual improvement. Such a Minister conceives it his duty to supply, as far as possible, the deficiencies that arise from the ignorance or irreligion of parents and sponsors. He will be anxious that every individual under his pastoral control should be well acquainted with the nature and solemnity of his baptismal engagements, and that godfathers and godmothers should be sensible of the awful responsibility attached to the characters they have assumed. He will use every effort to rouse his auditors from that irreligious indifference and imbecility which too often prompts them to rely on the rites and ceremonies

nies of religion, as if they were merely charms and incantations, and will instruct them in the nature, the spirit, the vitality of religion, as distinct from its outward forms and observances. His exertions being the effect, not of sentimental fluctuations of feeling, but of permanent Christian affection, and a sense of religious duty, will not be occasional acts, but settled habits. Like his adorable Master, he will continually go about doing good. It will be his meat and his drink to do the will of his Father which is in heaven. This is, or ought to be, the character of every converted Minister. And what spectacle can be more sublime and heavenly than a Pastor thus actuated by zeal for the glory of God, and the best interests of mankind? What is there in this unworthy of the scholar or the gentleman? Yet it is not uncommon to hear

the less conspicuous duties of the ministry, particularly those that have been just detailed, spoken of with contempt, as too servile for a man of spirit, and too humble for a man of rank. Not, however, to mention the absurdity of supposing that any office can be degrading that is dignified by its relation to God and the celestial world, it may be just observed, that where the Christian graces are in their proper vigour, there will always be a pleasure attending the discharge of an acknowledged duty, which will far more than compensate for its natural inconveniences. Constitutional indolence, pride, diffidence, love of studious retirement, and even health and interest, will in vain conspire to check the conscientious ardour of that man who estimates his ministerial duties by the unerring standard of truth. Were we to select as examples, the

primitive Christians and fathers of the church, we should immediately discover in them a zeal and philanthropy, the very reverse of that cold, calculating, and selfish spirit, so often visible in certain of their modern successors. The ardour and affection of a missionary are the legitimate feelings of a Christian teacher; for, although a thousand just and proper considerations ought, of course, in most cases, to confine his personal labours to a limited sphere, yet his zeal and love should be universal. The Gospel knows not of a philanthropy bounded by rocks, and circumscribed by rivers. If, then, the affections of a pious Minister be naturally so ardent and so widely extended, we may surely expect to see something of their effects, when concentrated to a focus, and brought to bear on one object. How, then, can he, who never manifests any

anxiety or exertion in his parish, be considered as under the influence of such divine principles? The man who is living up to the standard of his profession, *must*, in some degree, partake of that spirit which has been described.

The *literary pursuits* of a Minister will, in many cases, afford a strong evidence of his religious character. Secular studies, however congenial to a person's taste, or necessary for his recreation, cannot possibly be the chief object of any Minister who is conscientiously devoted to his pastoral engagements. Whatever studies, on the other hand, he conceives proper, to fit him for discharging more usefully the work of an evangelist, will be objects of his diligent attention. When we consider that Clergymen are usually persons of literary habits, it will easily be perceived,


that an ardour for extra-professional studies, is a temptation exactly fitted to their disposition, and one by which they are more likely to be seduced, than by others of a less specious appearance. A *moderate* indulgence in secular studies, for the purpose of relaxation, may not, perhaps, be highly reprehensible, especially as every kind of knowledge, if properly applied, is, in some measure, important. But when such pursuits seize on the mind, and become predominant, while a Minister's professional duties are neglected in order to gain leisure for them, and the souls committed to his care are passing, unpitied and uninstructed, into eternity, we may reasonably conclude that there is some important defect in his religious character, and that he knows neither the responsibility of his vocation, nor the hazard he incurs of being condemned.

at the tribunal of Heaven, as an unprofitable servant.

The *recreations*, also, of a Clergyman are important tests of his character. There are many amusements, which, if not flagrantly wrong, are at least questionable, and which a pious Minister, desirous of avoiding the appearance of evil, will not countenance by his presence. There are others, again, including several of the most popular diversions of this country, which are wholly incompatible with the genuine *spirit* of Christianity, while they are not, perhaps, verbally and explicitly condemned by the letter. A Minister, therefore, who is "a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God," may choose to defend by arguments, not wholly unpalatable, many amusements which he knows to be wrong, and which he defends, only

to persuade men, that, in pursuing them, he acts with the concurrence of his deliberate judgment, when, in fact, he merely conforms to his unsanctified disposition. Not thus the true Christian Minister. The man who deserves this sacred name, will abstain, not only from those things which are overtly flagitious, but from those also which are unclerical, and which might, in any degree, prevent the success of his ministry. Jealous for the honour of his God, he will consider no recreation justifiable which might offend the weak, or give occasion of triumph to the wicked. Besides, he has lost his relish for those things which, to an unconverted Minister, are daily snares and temptations. His mind being engrossed in higher pursuits, needs not the stimulus of dissipation to prevent its preying upon itself. He has renounced the pomps

and vanities of this wicked world, and feels no desire to be again in bondage to its "beggary elements." Besides, he considers his time as too sacred a deposit to be spent in frivolity. Men of business, indeed, often imagine that the time of a Clergyman is of far less value than that of other professional men. Whence has arisen this unjust opinion? Why is it that an invitation to a Clergyman, to spend a few weeks in a circle of dissipated acquaintances, should be considered an ordinary compliment; while the same invitation to a responsible statesman, or to an officer on duty, would be esteemed a preposterous request? Is it that the functions of the one are less sacred than the engagements of the others? Or rather, is it not, that an unconverted Minister, being as much and as evidently the slave of pleasure as an unconverted layman, the



world, judging by the conduct of the irreligious part of the clergy, hastily imputes the same disposition to the whole body? But, whatever may be the practice of those who have improperly “climbed into the fold” without any intention of becoming faithful pastors, the really pious Minister cannot be the slave of fashion. He has neither time nor inclination to swell the processions of gaiety. His spirits not being secular, his amusements will not be such. There are atmospheres which he knows he cannot breathe without contamination. Besides, he has a definite object of pursuit, and is conscious that the souls of his people will be required at his hand. A man, habitually thus impressed, will not devote his mornings to the chase, or his evenings to the card-table; he will not feel ambitious of being the steward of a race-ground,

or the litigious guardian of the game-laws; he will neither appear the foppish and idle attendant of female vanity, nor the boisterous associate of Bacchanalian carousals. Though these characters differ, it must be confessed, among themselves, and cordially despise the pursuits of each other; yet, in the present instance, they ought to be classed together; for, if a Minister be evidently immersed in worldly pleasures, it matters little, as far as respects his religious or ministerial character, whether those pleasures be refined or rustic; for, in either case, he is equally far from giving proof of his conversion to God, or his devotedness to the duties of his station.

It may be remarked, that good and bad Ministers usually differ in their views of their ecclesiastical function. The former class regards it

chiefly in relation to God, the latter as part of the legal constitution of the country : the one, as a political and temporal concern ; the other, as a spiritual and eternal one. A pious Minister is not ashamed of his vocation. He conceives that even the lowest station in the sanctuary, on account of its connexion with the most awful and interesting of human affairs, is of immense importance. He therefore magnifies his office, while he debases himself. But the contrary character appears ashamed of the Gospel viewed simply, and has recourse to extrinsic considerations to prove his respectability. His ideas of the honour of the profession are connected with those of power, and emolument, and patronage ; he cannot divest himself of these external trifles, to survey the character of a true Minister in its native unassisted

dignity. But wherever there exists no higher view of the Christian ministry than one merely secular and professional, we may, without violation of charity, infer that there is a serious error ; for among those who refer to the Scriptures as their standard of decision, the outward honours of the ministerial character bear no proportion whatever to its importance with regard to the souls of men, and its responsibility in the sight of God.

A considerable degree of prejudice is often excited, either in favour of a Minister, or against him, by his manner of conducting the services of the church, and by the general appearance of his congregation. Nor is this prejudice, perhaps, altogether unreasonable. The spirit of a Minister being naturally transfused into his people, the attention and solemnity of

the latter are in some measure a presumptive evidence of the devout deportment of the former. There is also a pathos in the manner and elocution of a man who is religiously impressed with the services in which he is engaged, very different from the coldness and indifference of him who conducts them as mere official ceremonies. The consequence is such as might naturally be expected: for while, in those congregations whose Ministers either fail to exhibit the peculiarities of the Gospel, or conduct its ordinances in an insipid and perfunctory manner, there is observable, on the part of the people, a corresponding indifference and inattention, we shall perceive, in those where it is faithfully taught, that the majority of the worshippers seem interested in the service, and evince an apparent spirit of devotion, which, though it be in many

cases nothing more than the natural influence of good example, is certainly much to be preferred to carelessness and indecorum *.

* To what causes must it be ascribed, that many congregations, among whom the services of religion are conducted with general propriety, should be inattentive to the ordinance of singing, which is, without doubt, a very important part of those services? It will not be denied, that *congregational* singing is highly desirable; and yet, in many churches, the people have no share whatever in this ordinance, and seem to consider it merely a display of professional skill. In some country parishes it is employed, one might almost imagine, for no purpose whatever but to afford the officiating Minister leisure to change his robes and ascend the pulpit. Did the general indifference to this part of religious worship arise from any doubts whether or not it be of Divine appointment, and whether it be a beneficial and appropriate method of expressing our joys and sorrows, our prayers and our thanksgivings, it would be easy to overcome all scruples by plain citations from Scripture; and to prove, by the injunctions

The difference between the two characters in question is further con-

of God, and the example of good men, that it is both a duty and a privilege; but while the propriety and utility of singing are so readily acknowledged, is it not strange that so little practical attention is paid to the subject?

Much of the blame, though not the whole, often attaches to the Minister himself. From those who neglect every other duty, it might be useless to inquire why they neglect this also; but that *converted* Ministers, and men in other respects active and exemplary, should be heedless of that part of social worship which most nearly approaches the joys of heaven, is as surprising as it is culpable.

In some country parishes, the Minister is perhaps deterred from endeavouring to introduce congregational singing by a supposed inability in his people to conduct it with propriety. Some degree of awkwardness may, indeed, occur at first; but difficulties that arise solely from want of practice, will soon be surmounted. When once congregational singing is established, every new member insensibly acquires the habit of joining his fellow-worshippers. The difficulty con-

spicuous in their general conduct towards persons applying to them for

sists, therefore, only in the first introduction. Are not the ears of a Minister often tortured, while he is employed in visiting his people, by hearing from fields, and cottages, and places of public resort, the hateful music of wanton and licentious songs? What physical difficulty, then, exists to preclude these voices from being employed in the service of that God for whose glory they were given? The most illiterate congregations are sometimes heard to join unanimously in this delightful service: so that it is evident, no natural impediment exists to prevent the practice becoming general.

But many Ministers perhaps neglect to exert themselves in procuring more general attention to the singing, from an opinion that the majority of the people have been so long accustomed to consider it as the humble duty of the parish-clerk, that no persuasions would induce them to take their proper share in it. Let, however, the Clergyman be seen to consider it a matter of importance; let him appear personally interested; let him previously select the psalm himself, no longer leaving the clerk, or the band of the singing gal-

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religious advice. The one considers himself as the servant of God and

lery, to choose the passage frequently least appropriate to the occasion; and, above all, let him urgently represent its necessity to those of his congregation on whom he has most influence, and who are best skilled to carry his views into execution, and it cannot be long before he will discover symptoms of reformation. Thousands, who are now silent from false shame and fear of singularity, would be absolutely glad of an excuse for doing their duty; for, in an age when almost every family of respectability devotes some attention to music, it is really an act of self-denial, particularly for the younger auditors, to abstain from congregational singing, while taste and harmony are set at defiance by an ignorant parish-clerk, or, what is worse, while devotion and propriety are tortured by a band of self-sufficient itinerants.

But perhaps the most common excuse for the negligence of Ministers on this subject, is their want of a musical ear, and their consequent incapability of enjoying, like others, this means of grace. Admitting this to be the fact, is self-satisfaction a Minister's chief object?—Is it nothing

man, and is therefore happy that an opportunity occurs of being useful in

to set a good example to others?—Is it nothing, to show, that, whatever may be our personal indifference as far as *natural* pleasure is concerned, we are still anxious for the ordinance of God, and alive to those *spiritual* feelings which alone render it a reasonable service?—Is it nothing to afford the true Christian an opportunity of enjoying those pleasures which singing the praises of his God was designed to inspire?—Is it nothing to attract to divine service, by the social discharge of this delightful duty, those idlers of a parish who would otherwise be employed in openly profaning the sabbath?—In a word, is it nothing to prevent an important part of worship becoming a solemn mockery, and to engage the feelings and habits of a whole auditory on the side of religion rather than against it?

And yet, insensible of these and similar considerations, many Ministers are wholly inattentive to the singing in their churches. With an apathy of countenance that indicates their thoughts to be far otherwise engaged than in the sublime service of the moment, they stand before a congregation, and by their example damp, rather than assist,

his important vocation; the other, being ignorant of practical religion


either the fervency or the pleasures of devotion. It is chilling to an audience, to say nothing of its being irreverent in the presence of God, for a Minister to be seen with a negligent air composing his robes, or folding the leaves of his manuscript, absent in thought, evidently uninterested in the singing, and, by various little indications, betraying the impatience he feels for its conclusion. The sensation immediately spreads; and the people think themselves perfectly justified in neglecting that which their Minister, by his personal conduct, evidences to be of little importance. To prevent effects like these, it is not necessary that a Minister possess an ear attuned to harmony. Without the least outward enjoyment of music, he may make melody in his heart. Where this exists, nothing else is wanting. If the mind be engaged, the behaviour will be appropriate; the countenance will conform to the feelings of the soul. The man will naturally appear interested, and what interests the Minister will interest the people. Let, therefore, a Clergyman show by his own conduct that he values the singing equally

himself, is unanxious to teach others, and, in consequence, esteems every inquirer, however modest or sincere, as an intruder on his retirement. He measures the extent of his ecclesiastical duties by the *public* services that devolve upon him, forgetful that he ought to live in the spirit and practice of his profession as much during the intervals of public labour, as when actually engaged in it. Let us imagine that an individual, hitherto ignorant and careless, has been convinced, either by reading the Scripture, by the public "means of grace," or by the conversation of a friend, that he is a sinner before God, and that the threatenings denounced against the wicked are applicable to himself.

with the other parts of the service, and the sympathy natural to public assemblies will usually complete the rest.

Alarmed at the discovery, he properly applies to his regular teacher for advice or consolation. In this case, a Minister, who has himself been "convinced of sin," and has obtained hope and comfort from the promises of the Gospel, will feel it his duty to direct the inquirer to Him "who taketh away the sins of the world," and to answer those important questions which a sincere penitent is always anxious to propose. The advice, the prayers, and the scriptural exhortations of such a Pastor will usually be found to produce the desired effect; for the Spirit of God is not unfaithful to his own promises made to Ministers and their people in the sincere use of the appointed means of grace. But the merely nominal Minister is, in such cases, unavoidably embarrassed; not being practically acquainted with the subject himself, he knows not how to

act towards others, and perhaps even views the inquirer as a hypocrite or an enthusiast. That anxiety, which is the proper and legitimate effect of the Divine threatenings against sin;—the effect produced on the Philippian jailor, and on many other individuals mentioned in the Scriptures, and, in some degree, on Christians in general, he confounds with the hypochondriacal depressions of melancholy, or the ravings of self-torturing superstition. Instead, therefore, of imitating our Saviour and his Apostles, by describing the scriptural way of salvation, and thus applying the only remedy for a wounded conscience, he probably advises amusements, physicians, change of scene, and the like; and is pleased, if, by any means, he can divert the attention of the penitent from that which ought, more than all other subjects, to awaken and engross it. Such conduct is both



cruel and unreasonable; for, however frequent or alarming the examples of what is called religious melancholy may be conceived to be (a subject, by the way, on which more has been asserted than has been proved), we certainly ought not to take for granted, that every man who appears in earnest about his salvation is necessarily infected. A converted Minister will endeavour to distinguish between a morbid imagination and a contrite spirit; whereas, the unconverted classes them together, and predicates of every person on whom the Scriptures have produced their proper and salutary effect, that he is an enthusiast or a madman.

Mildness and condescension belong more or less to every pious Minister; for the natural pride of the human

heart cannot control the gentle influences of Christianity. A good man will think no service degrading by which he may promote the eternal welfare of his flock. While he maintains the dignity of his character by a firm and manly conduct, he will be far from that harsh unfeeling superciliousness which the world affects to consider as a prominent feature in the ecclesiastical character. His humility, being combined with ardent zeal and affection, will prompt him to sacrifices of personal ease, pleasure, interest, and natural feeling, of which other men have no adequate idea; but he enjoys the smile of his God, and needs not the applause of an ungrateful world.

Every good man, and more especially a Minister, will practise self-denial. While he enjoys the blessings

of Providence, he will not abuse them, but will study in all things to be an example to the flock. Considered with this view, even his table, his domestic arrangement, and other things equally trivial, may be strong evidences of his character.

The friends of a pious Minister, as far as selection depends upon himself, will be Christian. He will mix with the world only with a view to benefit it, but his solace and delight will be with "the excellent of the earth." Among companions of this character, religious intercourse, which has been long banished from society at large, will find an agreeable refuge. If it were possible for an irreligious Minister to appear in every other respect undistinguishable from a religious one, he might be detected by the general tenour of his familiar unsuspecting in-

tercourse. Whatever the world at large might think of him, his intimate associates would easily perceive, that his religion was merely a professional garb, of which he was glad to divest himself, in order to participate, with less incumbrance, in the gaieties of worldly conversation. On the other hand, the opposite character would give a new proof that his heart was right with God, and that he valued the moments of social unrestrained converse, not because he was then more at liberty to drink into a worldly spirit without hazarding his reputation, but because he had an opportunity of conversing on many sublime and heavenly subjects, which, if introduced into promiscuous assemblies, would be treated with insult and contempt. The remarks of an unconverted Minister, on religious topics, if not otherwise reprehensible, will usually betray such

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a degree of practical indifference to the subject, as can scarcely comport with a really religious habit of mind; while the pious Minister, without parade or affectation, incidentally shows by his ordinary conversation, and by his habit of referring every thing to the scriptural standard, that religion is with him an important and personal concern; that it engrosses his thoughts, inspires his motives, and regulates his life.

If we follow the pious Minister from these more retired scenes, and begin to examine his general commerce with society, we shall perceive a correctness of principle, a susceptibility of moral feeling, an integrity, purity, and elevation of mind, which even the man of the world must admire, although he may not discover their origin, or duly appreciate their value,

which an inquirer is gradually conducted to newness of life, and a profession of "the truth as it is in Jesus."


But one of the strongest tests of a Minister, and one which should by no means be forgotten, is his willingness or unwillingness to bear the reproach of the cross of Christ ; for, even in this happy country, where Christianity in its purest form is the national religion, something of this reproach still remains. The excellency of our political and ecclesiastical regulations cannot prevent the accomplishment of that prophecy, that "*all* who live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." It is not possible for the Gospel to be professed in its unsophisticated energy and spirit, without exciting the opposition of mankind. Let us imagine that an individual among the lower orders of society,

from a course of life overtly flagitious, should become a reformed and exemplary character. This change, being imputed to merely moral causes, or to motives of expediency, would most certainly procure him a degree of respect and encouragement which he could not otherwise have enjoyed. It is evident, therefore, that morality, simply considered, is far from being an object of contempt or persecution. But if the individual under consideration should openly avow that it was the denunciations of the Bible against sin, that first excited his alarm; that, despairing of salvation by his own merits, he had learned to trust wholly and implicitly to the merits of Him who came to take away the sins of the world; and that, in correspondence to his new nature, and as a proof of his sincerity, he had solemnly resolved to live no longer to

himself, but to Him who had bought him with the price of his own blood ; and if in future he were to make it his undivided aim, to fulfil his baptismal engagements, to confess the faith of Christ crucified, to fight manfully under his banners, and to continue his faithful servant and soldier unto his life's end, and were to exemplify in his conduct that holiness, spirituality, and self-denial, which such resolutions were calculated to inspire,—would the same result take place as in the former instance? Would he not rather be censured than applauded by the world around him? Would not his name be often heard in connexion with the terms hypocrite, enthusiast, and others of similar import? In a word, would he not be one instance among many, that the offence of the cross has not ceased ; but that, wherever our holy religion appears

in its genuine form, the hatred of mankind is sure to be excited against it? The sarcastic hint, the retorted sneer, the malice of the tongue, the annoying vexations of petty insult, are still employed, in place of more formidable weapons, to oppose the Gospel, as often as it is seen in its natural energy and spirit; and the wounds inflicted by these poisoned arrows, though not worthy to be compared with the persecutions of the first Christians, are yet usually far more than an unconverted Minister will consent to endure. No regularity of deportment, no consistency with the doctrines and discipline of the Establishment, no amiableness of manners and disposition, nothing, in short, but an unholy compliance with the world, can entirely prevent the reproach which every Minister of Christ is appointed to sustain.

There are, however, certain Clergymen, of whom it is difficult to judge without a very intimate acquaintance. They are not heterodox in their creed, they are not inattentive to their professional duties, and their lives are not openly inconsistent with their acknowledged sentiments; yet amidst so much that is excellent, there appears perhaps some reason to doubt whether they are decidedly pious. Their vices, indeed, are chiefly negative, and their virtues, perhaps, are of a similar character. In cases of this kind, the test just mentioned is one of the most appropriate. We shall almost always discover that persons of this description are studious of "avoiding the offence of the cross." They appear afraid of being considered "righteous overmuch;" they dread the reproach of man more than the displeasure of God; they dare not be



explicit on the more unfashionable parts of Christianity ; they hesitate to speak of the world as consisting but of two classes, the good and the bad, those that serve God, and those that serve him not ; and appear above all things desirous of softening down what they imagine to be the harsher features of the Gospel, and, in consequence, are willing to accept for true piety what the Bible would condemn as practical unbelief. There is always something wrong when a person is thus anxious to confound moral or religious distinctions. The *converted* Minister must necessarily be a man of decided character.

This test ought, however, to be applied with caution. Some men are buffeted for their faults, and not for their piety. Eccentricity, concealed ambition, or affected humility, may

pretend that the reproach with which they are deservedly assailed is the hostility of the human heart to true religion: but there is usually something in such characters to unfold the secret, and to prove that they differ essentially from the patient, unostentatious disciple of the lowly Jesus.

These, then, appear to be some of the chief evidences by which a converted Minister may be distinguished from an unconverted one. But to delineate the ministerial character adequately is impossible; for who can fully conceive what that man *ought* to be, who is sent by the Sovereign of the Universe as his herald to a world in arms, with denunciations of wrath which the tongue of angels might falter to proclaim; and with tidings of love and mercy so ineffable and divine, that even imprisoned demons,

were they interested in them, would melt with contrition, and rejoice once more to employ the golden harps of heaven in singing songs of glory and praise to their beneficent Creator? Were a Minister to walk altogether worthy of his high vocation, it would be impossible to mistake his character. He would appear among men as an inhabitant of a superior world. His conversation would be in heaven. Elevated above earth, he would learn to look down with equal eye on its honours and its frowns, its sorrows and its enjoyments. His spotless garments would be uncontaminated with its pollutions. Employed in the same, or even a higher work than that of angels, he would participate their spirit. His manners would be celestial. Like the Redeemer himself, he would appear on earth but as one come to do good; and when his course was

finished, would quit it with "hope full of immortality and glory."

But since Ministers are men of like passions with others, we must be content to look for a degree of excellence very far short of what the unequalled dignity and holiness of their function might be supposed capable of inspiring. Considered in this view, the preceding characteristics of a converted Minister, however inadequate to the full description of what he *ought* to be, will not be found in experiment wholly insufficient.

Yet how many fall short, I will not say of what an ambassador for God might be supposed to be, but even of that character which it is possible for the weakest of men, with the Divine blessing, to attain! Who that surveys any body of Ministers

(the national Clergy of England by no means excepted), but will see many whom the preceding characteristics, if correct and scriptural, prove to be unconverted, and without God in the world? Avoiding every thing like vague and indiscriminate censure, may it not be too truly asserted, that there are *individuals* in the English Church, as in every other, who by open immoralities are a disgrace to themselves and their profession? Are there not those, who, heedless of the anathemas so frequently and awfully denounced in Scripture against unfaithful guides, are indolent and unconcerned, while the souls of their people are perishing for lack of knowledge? Pre-eminent as we are among nations and among churches, it would be impossible to answer these questions without acknowledging a fact of the most humiliating nature. It is

nothing in the present argument to affirm, that the English Clergy, as a body, are the highest in the scale of excellence of all the national churches now existing; for, while there is *but one* irreligious Minister in the Church, there is sufficient cause for shame, for discrimination, and for prayer.

There are, however, many persons who object to discussions of the present nature, considering them as calculated to expose the established Clergy in the eyes of those who are already too much incensed against them, and thus to diminish what still remains among the body of the people of confidence in their established Pastors. If, indeed, the silence of the members of the Church would impose silence on its enemies, the argument might be considered not wholly unpalatable. But, in the pre-

sent state of things at least, it is surely better to consider the subject at home, and even to court inquiry, than to shut our eyes and affect ignorance, till we are roused by the clamours of our opponents. In the Church of Rome it was necessary that the characters of ecclesiastics should be considered as too sacred for animadversion, since the slightest exposure might accidentally lead (as, indeed, afterwards happened) to a development of the whole internal system of Popery, which its patrons were aware would decline from the moment the public became acquainted with its real nature. But in a Church, pure in its doctrines and liberal in its spirit; a Church, that seeks not temporal power any farther than it may tend to religious utility, and that has no ultimate object in view, but to ensure the preaching of the Gospel to

the present and to future ages, the discussion of its real state is not only a duty, but an advantage. If it could be even proved that every Minister in the Church was an unconverted man, the knowledge of this fact would be preferable to the unfounded hope of ignorance. The one would probably rouse men from their slumbers, and excite them to religious investigation, while the other would tranquillize them with a deceitful peace, till the moment for repentance and conversion was forever lost. So far, however, from the proportion between the good and the bad becoming more unfavourable as we proceed with our inquiries, it is certain, that, the more we examine the subject, the more will the Church of England triumph over the misrepresentations of her calumniators. However common instances of supineness and profligacy among the Clergy

may be conceived to be, they certainly are far from being so common as the enemies of the Church would induce us to believe. The character of a wicked Minister is notorious to all; whereas the fame of a pious one is often confined within the small circle of his own parish. The estimate, therefore, of a cursory inquirer will seldom be correct. He catches, perhaps, the more prominent features of deformity, while a thousand beauties lie neglected in the shade. Hence, all is confusion and gloom. But if the signs of unconversion are not to be suppressed, much less ought those favourable circumstances to be suppressed, which the world is less willing to observe. The language of the Clergy to their opponents must be frank and manly. It is useless to affect to take for granted that the sacred profession can constitute him a

good man, whom his life proves to be a bad one. Let them state the truth with mildness and impartiality. So large a society as the Clergy of this land cannot, in the nature of things, be free from unworthy members; but if it can be shown to be encumbered with a much smaller proportion of them than is generally conceived, an important point will have been gained. And is not that proportion daily decreasing? As a proof that it is, I might refer to that spirit of serious inquiry which appears every where prevalent, and to that assiduity with which the studies proper for a Christian Minister begin to be pursued; to that increasingly scriptural tone of preaching which is heard from our pulpits; to those various societies which are springing up amongst us for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom; and to that large body of

pious and learned men who are continually entering the Church, and who bid fair to carry it, with the blessing of Heaven, to heights of religious prosperity hitherto unknown.

Ministers of the Church ought not to shrink from a fair trial of their principles and character, but should rather endeavour to promote in each other such a degree of piety and discretion as may stand the test of the severest examination. Then, and then only, will the weapons of their enemies be useless.

The arguments of those who oppose all discussions of the present nature, seem, therefore, to be of little weight. We cannot, indeed, feel too strongly the sacredness of individual character; but it surely implies a morbid sensibility, not to say a more

unworthy feeling, when persons shrink from the abstract discussion of important religious subjects, and are afraid of the characters of men being discussed, even in a general point of view, lest some unpleasant consequences should arise from the application of theoretical truth to practical researches.

But feeling is, or ought to be, out of the question. The souls of men are concerned, and minor considerations must, therefore, disappear. If those who profess to instruct others in the way to heaven, be ignorant of it themselves, the consequences are too awful to be risked for the sake of gratifying the false delicacy of individuals. It is essential to the interest of the people at large, and also of individual Ministers themselves, that "the precious be separated from the

vile." If the blind lead the blind, both must fall. The advantages of serious examination into the characters of the Clergy must, therefore, always be far more than commensurate with its inconveniences. The unfaithful may, indeed, be exposed to disgrace; but the pious will, at the same time, be rewarded with the honour due to their fidelity and labours.

If there be any character of whom but faint hopes can be entertained, it is surely that of a Minister who has been gradually hardened by the habitual recurrence of those truths which were intended to produce a contrary effect, and who, never doubting of his own conversion, refuses to institute an investigation by which his real character may be ascertained. Were it not for those influences of the Holy Spirit, which can silently produce the

most astonishing effects on the human soul, when suasion and advice have been long exerted without apparent success; the case of such a man might be considered altogether hopeless. But, admitting this divine agency, it is possible for the most prejudiced individual to be convinced of his error; and even these remarks, feeble as the writer feels and acknowledges them to be, may not have been written in vain.

A moment will arrive, even before the day of final judgment, in which every Minister must learn to appreciate the importance of such inquiries as those which have been suggested. In his last hours, he will feel it to be of little consequence that he has been a teacher of others, if he be still unconverted himself. His personal salvation, the responsibility of his office,

and the fearful account he must render for his neglect of the souls of men, will then torture his mind with inconceivable anxiety ; unless, which is far more to be deprecated, he still remain under the power of that strong delusion which has beguiled him all his life, and die with a presumptuous hope which the Almighty has no where promised to realize.

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A conspicuous aim of a pious minister
is to desire to save himself & those
hear him —

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